

Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 030813

NODIS
FOR DR BRZEZINSKI

FOLLOWING REPEAT TEL AVIV 1693 ACTION STATE FEB 6.

QUOTE S E C R E T TEL AVIV 1693

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

PASS WHITE HOUSE FOR BRZEZINSKI

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PCAT, MASS, IS, EG, SA, US
SUBJ: SALES OF SOPHISTICATED AIRCRAFT TO SAUDI ARABIA AND
EGYPT -- AN ISRAELI VIEW FROM WEIZMAN

REF: STATE 30732

SUMMARY: MINISTER OF DEFENSE WEIZMAN ARGUED STRONGLY
AGAINST USG SALES OF ADVANCED AIRCRAFT TO EITHER SAUDI
ARABIA OR EGYPT, AT THIS TIME, LAYING MAJOR STRESS ON
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THEIR IMPACT ON ISRAELI ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. HE ASSERTED THAT F-15'S, ESPECIALLY IF STATIONED IN NORTHWEST SAUDI ARABIA, WOULD POSE A SERIOUS THREAT TO ISRAEL, WHILE F5E'S IN EGYPT WOULD REQUIRE A STIFFENING OF ISRAEL'S POSITION IN THE SINAI NEGOTIATIONS. HE SUGGESTED THAT U.S. SHOULD HANDLE SADAT'S F5E REQUEST IN SUCH A WAY AS TO HELP ISRAEL OBTAIN A SATISFACTORY AGREEMENT ON SINAI, OTHERWISE, HE IMPLIED, ISRAEL WOULD HAVE TO INSIST ON MORE DIFFICULT SINAI PROVISIONS REGARDING AIRFIELDS AND DEMILITARIZATION. WEIZMAN

RECOGNIZES THE SEPARATE U.S. INTERESTS INVOLVED BUT IS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC BACKLASH HERE AFFECTING NEGOTIATIONS. HE IS SEARCHING FOR A WAY TO RESPOND TO THE AIRCRAFT DECISION WHICH HE ANTICIPATES WILL OCCUR IN THE NEAR FUTURE WHILE, AT THE SAME TIME, KEEPING THE MILITARY NEGOTIATIONS WITH EGYPT UNDERWAY. END SUMMARY.

1. I MET WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE WEIZMAN AT HIS OFFICE FOR AN HOUR AND FORTY MINUTES LATE SUNDAY AFTERNOON, FEBRUARY 5. PRESENT WERE WEIZMAN'S EXECUTIVE OFFICER, PTC TEHILA, AND COLONEL WILLIAMS. DISCUSSION CENTERED AROUND POSSIBILITY OF U.S. SALES OF SOPHISTICATED AIRCRAFT TO SAUDI ARABIA AND EGYPT AND THE CURRENT STATE OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS (SEPTTEL). MEETING WAS OUTGROWTH OF A TELEPHONE CALL FROM WEIZMAN AT 0030 SUNDAY IN WHICH HE EXPRESSED GREAT CONCERN OVER MEDIA REPORTS CONCERNING USG INTENTIONS VIS-A-VIS AIRCRAFT SALES. (BASED ON REFTTEL, I HAD TOLD HIM AT 0830 SUNDAY THAT NO RPT NO DECISION YET TAKEN ON F5E'S FOR EGYPT.)

2. WEIZMAN KICKED OFF OUR MEETING WITH HIS TYPICAL SECRET

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MILITARY PREDISPOSITION TO ATTACK RATHER THAN TO DEFEND, STATING THAT FOR THE USG TO ANNOUNCE ANY SALES OF WEAPONS SYSTEMS TO SAUDI ARABIA AND EGYPT, PARTICULARLY SOPHISTICATED AIRCRAFT, WHILE THE TALKS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND EGYPT ARE GOING ON "WILL BE A MISTAKE." AT THE SAME TIME, HE ALLOWED THAT SUCH SALES COULD BE VIEWED AS "LOGICAL" ONCE PEACE WAS ACHIEVED. IN AN ASIDE, HE SAID THAT HE REALLY HAS A FEELING THAT THE USG HAS ALREADY DECIDED TO SELL AIRCRAFT TO BOTH SAUDI ARABIA AND EGYPT. I SAID THAT SO FAR AS I KNEW, NO RPT NO DECISIONS HAD YET BEEN TAKEN, THOUGH I ANTICIPATED THEY COULD WELL BE MADE IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. WEIZMAN THEN RECOUNTED HIS EXPERIENCES AT THE RECENT MILITARY COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND HIS OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT STATE OF NEGOTIATIONS (SEPTTEL). HE CONCLUDED THESE REMARKS BY EXPRESSING A REAL CONCERN THAT THE ISRAELI PEOPLE WERE BECOMING DISILLUSIONED, AND IF THE USG "THROWS GIVING ARMS TO EGYPT (INTO THE EQUATION) AT THIS POINT IT WILL BE REALLY NO GOOD."

3. AT THIS POINT I REVIEWED AT LENGTH FOR HIM THE BACKGROUND OF EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE PROPOSALS FOR SALE OF F-15'S TO SAUDI ARABIA, F5E'S TO EGYPT AND F-16'S TO ISRAEL, DRAWING ON SOME OF OUR DISCUSSIONS LAST WEEKEND AT THE AMMAN COM MEETINGS AND LINKING ISSUE TO THE PRESIDENT'S NEW POLICIES ON CONVENTIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS. I EXPLAINED VERY CAREFULLY HOW THE

JUXTAPOSITION OF THESE THREE PROPOSALS NOW CREATES A DIFFICULT DILEMMA FOR PRESIDENT CARTER. I ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT THE SITUATION, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO SAUDI ARABIA, WAS NOT ONE IN WHICH THE ALTERNATIVE TO NON-U.S. SALES WOULD BE NO AIRCRAFT SALES, SINCE FRANCE WAS WAITING IN THE WINGS. AS FOR EGYPT, I SAID THAT THERE ARE REASONABLE AND LEGITIMATE MILITARY REQUIREMENTS FOR AIR FORCE MODERNIZATION WHICH ARE FOCUSED ON GROWING FEARS OF SOVIET SUPPORTED THREATS TO
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THE SOUTH, ON LIBYA TO THE WEST AND ON THE CUTOFF OF SOVIET SUPPLY. I MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE IDEA OF FREEZING ALL NEW AIRCRAFT SALES IN THE REGION WHILE NEGOTIATIONS GO FORWARD WOULD NOT ONLY BE TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE TO THE SAUDIS, BUT WOULD OF COURSE PRODUCE GREAT OUTRAGE IN ISRAEL AND IMMEDIATELY RAISE THE SPECTRE OF "UNACCEPTABLE DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE" I SAID AS POLITELY BUT AS CLEARLY AS POSSIBLE THAT THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS INVOLVED HERE WHICH ARE REGIONAL IN NATURE. AND NOT LIMITED TO OUR FIRM HISTORIC COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL'S SECURITY.

4. WEIZMAN RESPONDED THAT HE RECOGNIZES WE HAVE SUCH BROADER INTERESTS, AND HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE AWKWARD DILEMMA WE FACE. NEVERTHELESS, HE SAID, THE SITUATION IS NOT THE SAME NOW AS IT WAS BEFORE SADAT'S VISIT TO JERUSALEM AND THUS USG COMMITMENTS (TO SAUDI ARABIA) SHOULD BE RE-ANALYZED IN THAT LIGHT; I.E., WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IN THE MIDDLE EAST WHILE THE PROCESS OF ACHIEVING PEACE IS ONGOING; AND, WHAT COULD BE DONE WHEN PEACE IS ACHIEVED. HE FELL BACK ON THE OFT-HEARD ARGUMENT THAT IN EVENT OF WAR SAUDI ARABIA WOULD GIVE THE F-15'S TO EGYPT TO USE AGAINST ISRAEL. "I WOULD NOT BE AS CONCERNED AS I AM IF I WERE SURE THAT THE USG COULD ESTABLISH REAL SAFEGUARDS AGAINST THE HANDING OVER." I POINTED OUT THAT ALTHOUGH OBVIOUSLY NOT A BASIS FOR TOTAL GUARANTEE, THE USG CAPABILITY TO CONTROL MISUSE OF THE AIRCRAFT IS VERY GREAT. WEIZMAN SAID HIS WORRY WAS NOT IMMEDIATE BUT RATHER FOCUSED ON THE POTENTIAL "SIX TO SEVEN YEARS FROM NOW IF PEACE BREAKS DOWN." HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT IF THE F-15'S WERE STATIONED ONLY IN THE EAST OF SAUDI ARABIA, PROTECTING THE HEARTLAND AND THE OILFIELDS, HIS WORRIES MIGHT BE
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LESSENER. HOWEVER, THERE WAS AN AIRFIELD AT TABUK WHICH THREATENED (AND IS THEREFORE A TARGET FOR) ISRAEL. I ASKED HIM TO PLACE HIMSELF IN THE SHOES OF THE SAUDI CHIEF OF STAFF- WOULD HE NOT HAVE A REQUIRE-

MENT FOR AN AIRFIELD IN THE NORTHWEST OF SAUDI ARABIA?
HIS RESPONSE WAS NONCOMMITTAL.

5. I TOLD WEIZMAN THAT AS A NON-CONFRONTATION STATE
SAUDI ARABIA REFUSES TO DISCUSS THEIR DEFENSE PROBLEMS
AS A PART OF THE PEACE NEGOTIATION PROCESS EQUATION. HE
AGREED THAT HE WOULD BE MORE WORRIED ABOUT SOPHISTICATED
AIRCRAFT IN SAUDI ARABIA IF SUCH AIRCRAFT WERE NOT U.S.
AND ADDED "PARTICULARLY IF THEY WERE FRENCH."

6. OBVIOUSLY FRUSTRATED AT HAVING FAILED TO PERSUADE
ME WITH HIS ARGUMENTS AGAINST F-15 SAUDI ARABIA SALES,
HE SHIFTED TO THE F5E FOR EGYPT. IN THIS CASE, HE TOOK
A NEW APPROACH. RATHER THAN STRESSING THE THREAT TO
ISRAEL POSED BY U.S. SALES TO EGYPT, HE FOCUSED UPON
HOW SUCH SALES MIGHT BE USED AS "LEVERAGE TO EXPEDITE
AND SUBSTANTIATE PROGRESS IN THE (PEACE) PROCESS."
HE INDICATED THAT EGYPT MUST RECOGNIZE THAT THE INTRO-
DUCTION OF F5E'S ("WHICH WILL PROBABLY LEAD TO REQUESTS
FOR F-16'S LATER ON") CHANGES THE MILITARY
SITUATION--AND REQUIRES ISRAEL'S RETAINING TWO AIRBASES
(LATER MODIFIED TO ONE-ETZION), THE SETTLEMENTS AT
RAFIA, RADARS IN THE SINAI, DEMILITARIZATION OF THE SINAI
EAST OF THE MITLA (PASS), AND NO EGYPTIAN AIRBASE IN
SINAI. ONLY UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD HE "HAVE NO
PROBLEM WITH (F5E) AIRCRAFT." HIS IDEAS FOCUSED ON
ACHIEVING "A BARGAIN" IN WHICH THE MAIN FORCES OF BOTH
ISRAEL AND EGYPT ARE HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED WITH A COMPLETELY
DEMILITARIZED SINAI BETWEEN THEM, EGYPT "TRADING
TERRITORY FOR SOPHISTICATION." (I.E. EGYPT GETS MODERN
US AIRCRAFT, BUT AGREES TO KEEP THEM WEST OF THE CANAL
AS PART OF A NEAR TOTAL DEMILITARIZATION OF SINAI.)

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HE CLAIMED TO HAVE EXPLORED THIS IDEA PRIVATELY WITH
GAMASY AND THINKS THAT GAMASY'S RESPONSE TO SUCH A TRADE
WOULD BE FAVORABLE.

7. WEIZMAN SUGGESTED THAT THE US SHOULD USE THE F5E
REQUEST AS LEVERAGE TO HELP ISRAEL ACHIEVE THIS KIND OF
AGREEMENT WITH EGYPT. OTHERWISE, IF WE MERELY AGREE
TO SADAT'S REQUEST, WEIZMAN SAID, HE WOULD HAVE TO
STIFFEN HIS OWN NEGOTIATING POSITION ON SINAI MILITARY
ARRANGEMENTS TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE GREATER MILITARY
THREAT. HE URGED US TO USE THE F-5E REQUEST TO HELP
THE NEGOTIATIONS, RATHER THAN MAKING THINGS EVEN MORE
DIFFICULT BY MERELY ACCEDING TO IT.

8. COMMENT: MY SENSE IS THAT WEIZMAN IS NOT AS MUCH
WORRIED THAT THE SAKE OF ADVANCED AIRCRAFT TO SAUDI
ARABIA AND EGYPT WILL PRODUCE A MAJOR CHANGE IN THE
REGIONAL MILITARY BALANCE AS HE IS ABOUT HOW HE EXPLAINS

IT TO THE ISRAELI CABINET AND PEOPLE WHILE AT THE
SAME TIME ATTEMPTING TO KEEP THE MILITARY COMMITTEE
DISCUSSIONS GOING. THERE IS ALSO A GOOD DEAL OF HIS
EGO INVOLVED HERE, FOR HE SEES HIMSELF AS THE
"ISRAELI-EGYPT CONNECTION" AND WANTS TO RETAIN THAT
IMAGE. HE IS GENUINELY CONCERNED THAT USG DECISIONS
NOW TO SELL ADVANCED AIRCRAFT TO SAUDI ARABIA AND
EGYPT COULD RESULT IN HIS GOVERNMENT BREAKING OFF ALL
TALKS. HE WOULD PERSONALLY OBJECT TO SUCH A BREAK
OFF, BUT WOULD PROBABLY VOTE FOR IT TO PROTECT HIS
POLITICAL POSITION HERE OF THE HEAT MOUNTED. HIS
SEARCH FOR VARIOUS WAYS FOR ISRAEL TO ACCEDE; REGRET-

FULLY AND PROBABLY NOT QUIETLY, TO THE SALES ARE
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NONETHELESS MILDLY ENCOURAGING. PERHAPS THERE IS SOME
WAY TO PERSUADE SAUDI ARABIA TO STATION F-15'S IN
THE EAST RATHER THAN AT TABUK. AND PERHAPS THERE IS
THE GERM OF A GOOD IDEA IN WEIZMAN'S EXPLORATION WITH
GAMASY OF A "MORE SOHISTICATION FOR MORE DEMILITARI-
ZATION" TRADE. BUT ONE THING CAME THROUGH CLEARLY:
IF WE ANNOUNCE AN EARLY DECISION TO GO AHEAD ON F-5E'S,
THE NEGOTIATIONS OVER SINAI WILL GET EVEN TOUGHER.

9. SUGGEST DEPARTMENT REPEAT THIS MESSAGE TO CAIRO AND JIDDA. LEWIS U
NQUOTE VANCE

SECRET

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Message Attributes

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